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Facebook to Show Sponsored Ads in News Feed in 2012

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Dec. 21, 2011 —

go.com

Facebook users will soon see ads in their news feeds. The social network says it will gradually begin to show "Sponsored Stories" in the news feeds on users' web pages beginning in January 2012.

"Starting early next year, we will gradually begin showing Sponsored Stories in News Feed," a spokesperson for Facebook said. "Our goal is to do this thoughtfully and slowly. We hope to show people no more than one Sponsored Story in their News Feeds per day and the story will be clearly labeled."

Though users will not have the option to block the Sponsored Stories from appearing in their news feed or having their activity used for feed's ads, users will be able to "x" out of individual ads, Facebook said.

Facebook's new ad move is likely to provoke backlash from some users, who wish not to see the ads or have their content read by Facebook so that ads can be targeted to them. What's more, the ads will look so similar to regular news feed posts, and many users may not realize they are looking at an ad at first glance. This would be a good reason for the company to integrate the ads slowly, showing just one per day.

How will it work? Advertisers will pay to have user stories and interactions (such as "liking" a page, receiving updates from "liked" pages, checking into local businesses or sharing content from external sites) turned into featured ads. Facebook will display the ads in gray type at the bottom right corner of news feed stories.

This would not be Facebook's first try at mixing advertising with the site's social content. In 2006, the company began experimenting with the placement of sponsored material within the news feed, but stopped in 2008. Ads on Facebook have appeared in the site's sidebar (on the right side of one's screen) for some years. Starting next month, sponsored content will show up in both the news feed and the sidebar. The ads will not appear on mobile devices, but the technology blog TechCrunch reports Facebook is considering the idea.

With the introduction of Facebook's revamped online ad strategy, one of the world's most popular websites could change the standards of online ad spending.

"If Facebook can weather the protest of users who want an ad-free news feed, it will have managed to open a significant new revenue stream," wrote TechCrunch's Josh Constine.